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ABSTRACT

This public opinion poll examined the public's esteem for and beliefs about the responsibilities and social status of K-12 teachers in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, focusing on gender issues. Interviews were conducted with 982 people age 18-70 years from April-June 2001. Results indicated that all teachers were highly valued, particularly early childhood and elementary school teachers (the most feminized area of education). There was no decline in the status of teachers in early childhood, elementary, and lower secondary school, and only a small decline in the status of teachers in upper secondary school, in comparison to 1979 and in comparison to other occupations. Results also indicated that the teaching profession was characterized by inconsistent status. The respondents believed that teachers at each level of education fulfilled an important social role, but at the same time, respondents indicated that teacher salaries, and to some degree social status, were not in balance with teachers' important role. Results suggested that the public did not perceive the growing number of women teachers as a problem for the quality of education. (Contains 42 references.) (SM)

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The feminization and the social status of the teaching profession[1].

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a public opinion poll on public esteem, responsibilities and social status of primary and secondary school teachers in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium (= Flanders). The data were collected from April 2001 until June 2001. Subsequently a few of these results are discussed with a focus on gender. In Belgium, like in many Western countries, there have been two feminization tendencies; one at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century and a recent but less advanced one in the eighties. A major conclusion, is that all teachers are highly valued, particularly nursery teacher and primary school teachers. Furthermore, the research shows no decline in the status of the teacher in nursery, primary and lower secondary education (only a small decline in the status of the teacher in higher secondary education) in comparison with 1979 and in comparison with other occupations. These results contradict the common thesis that the status of the profession diminishes as an effect of the feminization. Partly based on these remarkable results, a future research on the perceptions of pupils, parents, colleagues and headmasters concerning differences between male and female teachers is presented.

Introduction

Recent educational statistics for Flanders reveal a significant increase of females in school teaching. This rise in the number of female teachers has most recently taken place in secondary education. This process has started earlier in primary school (Depaepe, De Vroede & Simon, 1993). Several authors (like Acker, 1995; Lahelma et al, 2000) state that in the popular discourse, but also in educational policy and among teaching scientists, this feminization has often been presented as a problem. Worries are expressed that education loses quality, that boys lack male rolemodels. Moreover, sociologists, educational scientists

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(like Etzioni, 1969) and teachers (Lahelma et al, 2000) often argue that one of the consequences of feminization is a decline in the social status of teaching. Contrastively feminization is often perceived as a consequence of the lower status ascribed to a career in education. Compared to the work of men the jobs of women are mostly perceived as less important or not even as real professions (Bradley, 1989). Moreover, many authors (Acker, 1995; Weber & Mitchell, 1995; Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999) indicate that teaching is often labelled as a women's occupation.

For several decennia the public esteem and the social status of teachers have been important issues in the social debate concerning education. In the Flemish speaking part of Belgium (=Flanders), several studies (Aelterman, 1992; Engels, 1994) indicate that teachers do not feel appreciated by society. In addition, teachers experience a decline in status. But what does society really think about teachers? Until recently, there were insufficient recent data indicating how society sees the teaching profession. To fill this gap the research group "professional development of the teacher" (Ghent University, Belgium) elaborated a study on the professional image of primary and secondary school teachers in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium (= Flanders) and the perception of the role and social status of teachers by society at large (Aelterman, Verhoeven et. al., 2002). This study was carried out in cooperation with the Catholic University of Leuven, the Free University of Brussels and the University of Antwerp[2]. A few conclusions drawn from this study can be linked with the gender literature.

In this paper we consecutively present the research findings on public esteem, responsibilities and social status of teachers and discuss these conclusions with a focus on gender. We will include this discussion in a research design on teachers and gender. Although it is very interesting to link gender, public esteem and social status, it is clear that these are not the only aspects of the teaching profession in which gender processes play a part. Therefore, we plan further research on gender in the professional lives of teachers. This paper ends with a discussion of the theoretical frame, research questions and methodology of this future research.

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2 AELTERMAN, A.; VERHOEVEN, J.C.; ENGELS; N.; VAN PETEGEM, P.; BUVENS, I. & ROTS, I., 2002. *De professionaliteit en de maatschappelijke waardering van leerkrachten basis- en secundair onderwijs*. OBPWO-project 00.03. Universiteit Gent/KU Leuven/VUB/UIA.

1. Study on public esteem, responsibilities and social status of teaching

Introduction

Using a questionnaire design, we conducted a public opinion poll on public esteem, responsibilities and social status of teachers. We used a representative sample of 982 people aged 18 to 70 years old. All respondents were interviewed face-to-face at home. The data collection was carried out by trained interviewers. The data were weighted by gender, age and level of diploma to allow for sampling variation.

In this paper we discuss the research results about the public esteem and the social status of the teaching profession. It is very important to recognize that the social status and the social prestige of an occupation are not the same as the individual's perception of this occupation or the esteem one has for people who practise this occupation. 'Public esteem' and 'social status' are two clearly distinctive concepts. Esteem refers to perceptions, ideas and feelings from individuals, mainly about the quality of the work, while social status refers to the position of an individual or a social group in the social stratification on a scale of social prestige. Dimensions like salary, responsibility, social benefit and social influence are genuine components of the status and prestige concept in our society. The difference in level between the concepts 'public esteem' and 'social status' is clear. The abstracted social status is a macrosociological phenomenon, a - depending on the theoretical approach - real or abstracted feature of a society, while the individual perception and valuation are situated at the micro-level. Probably there is also a difference in meaning and origin. Our research findings (cf. 1.1) indicate that an individual's personal esteem for teachers is mainly influenced by the contact with individual teachers, more specific the own experiences with teachers and the experiences of significant others (partner, children...). We can assume that 'personal esteem' is mainly based on experiences in the own living environment. However, the repeated confrontation with general opinions about teachers (e.g. in the media) can influence an individual's perception of the social status of the teaching profession.

1.1 Personal esteem for teachers

To measure the personal esteem for teachers we used the following question: 'Do you in general have appreciation for the way nursery school teachers (primary school teachers etc.) do their job?' The respondents could give four answers: 1) for no teacher at all, 2) for a

minority of teachers, 3) for most of the teachers and 4) for all the teachers. This results in a scale from 1 to 4, where 4 stands for a very high esteem for teachers.

First we give a general description of the survey results. Then we indicate if there are significant differences according to the characteristics of the respondents. The following classification variables were used in the analysis: age, gender, diploma, professional situation, professional prestige, own school experience, number of children, parental satisfaction with the teachers of their children, the involvement in education (through own professional experience, voluntary commitment, relatives and friends), the personal interest in education and the utilitarian individualistic attitude (i.e. a general orientation on self-interest and individual success). Only the variables that showed significant associations (significance level .05) under control of the 'key' variables: interest in education, diploma, own school experience and satisfaction with the teachers of the children will be discussed in this paper.

In general we see that teachers in nursery schools as well as in primary and secondary schools are highly appreciated by the broader community. Teachers in nursery and primary schools get the highest esteem (cf. table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Esteem for teachers

Appreciation	Nursery school %	Primary school %	Secondary school %
For no teacher at all	0.62	0.85	1.18
For a minority of teachers	4.28	7.62	15.37
For most teachers	57.28	71.91	67.51
For all teachers	37.82	19.62	15.94
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Nursery school teachers

The findings in table 1.1 show that public esteem for nursery school teachers in Flanders is very high. Almost 38% of the respondents appreciate all and 57% appreciate most nursery school teachers for the way they perform their work. Under control of the keyvariables, only *parental satisfaction with the teachers of the children* plays a significant role. Parents who are moderately ($\overline{X}$ = 3.39) or very ($\overline{X}$ = 3.51) satisfied with their children's teachers express a higher esteem for nursery school teachers than parents who are only little satisfied ($\overline{X}$ = 3.1) with the teachers of their children ($F(2,627) = 26.61$, $p < .0001$).

Primary school teachers

Just like nursery school teachers, primary school teachers get a high esteem for their work. Almost 72% appreciate most teachers in primary schools and almost 20% indicate to appreciate all primary school teachers.

Two characteristics of the respondents have a significant influence: *professional situation* and *parental satisfaction with the teachers of the children.*

Non-employed respondents (e.g. housewives, retired, disabled) ($\overline{X}$ = 3.20) hold primary school teachers in slightly higher esteem than employed ($\overline{X}$ = 3.05). The difference in means is small but significant ($F(2,925) = 6.86$, $p = .001$).

The *parental satisfaction with the teachers of the children* also has an impact on their esteem for primary school teachers ($F(2,626) = 22.92$, $p < .0001$). The more respondents are satisfied with the teachers of their children, the higher their esteem for primary school teachers. The means vary from 2.9 for the category of people who are least satisfied, over 3.12 to 3.25 for the most satisfied respondents. These three meanscores differ significantly.

Teachers in secondary education

Teachers in secondary education also get a high esteem for their work. 67,5% of the respondents appreciate most and 16% appreciate all teachers in secondary education for the way they do their work.

It is striking that the *own school experience* of the respondents is very meaningful ($F(2,912) = 12.38$, $p < .0001$). Respondents who have good memories of their own school time hold teachers in secondary education in a higher esteem ($\overline{X} = 3.13$) than respondents who have less positive ($\overline{X} = 2.96$) or rather negative memories ($\overline{X} = 2.89$). Yet, the latter still have high esteem for most teachers in secondary education. Probably their negative memories are connected with a few teachers they met during their school period.

Not only good memories of the own school time but also good *experiences with the teachers of the own children* have a positive effect on the appreciation for teachers in secondary education. Again parents who are very satisfied with the teachers of their children hold teachers in secondary education in a higher esteem ($\overline{X} = 3.17$) than parents who are moderately ($\overline{X} = 3.00$) or only little satisfied ($\overline{X} = 2.76$) ($F(2,608) = 26.58$, $p < .0001$).

1.2 Perception of the evolution in public esteem for teachers

Table 1.2 shows that most respondents do not report a major evolution in public esteem for teachers. Nevertheless, the broader community perceives a small decline in esteem, especially for teachers in primary and secondary education. Regarding the evolution in public esteem for nursery school teachers, opinions differ greatly but in general the respondents also perceive a small decline in esteem.

Table 1.2 Opinion about the evolution in public esteem for teachers in nursery, primary and secondary education (in %).

Compared with the past the public esteem is	N	$\overline{X}$	Now much less	Now a little less	About the same	Now a little higher	Now much higher
Nursery school teachers	946	2.88	12	28	27	25	8
Primary school teachers	962	2.40	19	43	21	13	4
Secondary school teachers	946	2.42	17	41	27	12	3

1.3 Perception of the (changing) responsibilities of teachers

In the survey we examined public opinion about the goals that are important in the work of teachers. In general, two main orientations towards the goals of education can be distinguished: an orientation towards qualification and schooling and an orientation towards personal and moral development. For each level of education, the respondents were presented with a list of six goals. Three of these goals refer to a more content orientedness of education, the other three to a broader pedagogic responsibility of the teacher.

Respondents were asked to choose the three goals that they thought were most important. Then they had to classify these goals in order of importance. This way we were able to get an indication of the extent to which teachers, according to the public opinion, have mainly a content oriented or rather a pedagogic responsibility. Table 1.3 gives an outline of the results. For each of the goals we give the percentage of respondents that have indicated this goal as first, second or third choice. The first three goals in the table are rather content oriented (of course in the questionnaire the goals were presented in mixed order).

Table 1.3 Outline of the presented goals per level of education and the number of respondents that indicated the goal as first, second or third important (in %)

Goals for the teacher in nursery education (N = 980)	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	Total
Preparing children for primary education	21	13	18	52
Making sure children develop cognitive skills	11	16	15	42
Teaching children to handle and complete tasks	5	12	19	36
Teaching children to get along with other children	35	24	15	74
Teaching children the ability to do things independently	10	16	16	42
Co-operating in the general education of children	18	19	17	54
Goals for the teacher in primary education (N = 978)	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	Total
Preparing children for secondary education	6	11	23	40
Transferring knowledge to children	19	20	15	54

Teaching children study skills	20	19	14	53
Teaching children to have respect and esteem for others	30	20	16	66
Teaching children to form a personal opinion	7	15	19	41
Co-operating in the general education of youngsters	18	15	13	46
Goals for the teacher in secondary education (N = 978)	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	Total
Preparing youngsters for higher education or employment	37	20	21	78
Teaching youngsters a subject	14	15	18	47
Teaching youngsters study skills	8	15	12	35
Teaching youngsters to have respect and esteem for others	21	15	13	49
Teaching youngsters to form a personal opinion	10	19	18	47
Co-operating in the general education of children	10	16	18	44

Clearly, respondents emphasize social education in nursery and primary school. Almost 75% indicate "teaching children to get along with other children" as one of the three most important goals for the teacher in nursery education. For more than a third of the respondents, this is even the most important goal. For primary education these percentages are lower but also for this level of education the item 'teaching children to have respect and esteem for others' is mostly chosen (by 66% of the respondents), 30% percent even say it is the most important goal for teachers in primary education. Still 49% of the respondents mention 'teaching youngsters to have respect and esteem for others' as one of the three most important goals for teachers in secondary education. Nevertheless, for this level of education respondents particularly stress the preparing for higher education or employment. This corresponds to the conclusion that public opinion expects teachers in secondary education to be experts in subject matter.

Striking for all levels of education is the rather low score for 'co-operating in the general education'. A little more than half the respondents indicate this as an important goal for teachers in nursery education. For teachers in primary and secondary education this is 46% and 44%. Therefore, it is clear society does not expect teachers to take over the educational responsibilities from parents.

Based on the classification of responsibilities we developed scales that reflect the importance of a pedagogic responsibility for the teacher in nursery, primary and secondary education.

These scales each have a score range from 0 (no pedagogic goal chosen) to 6 (only pedagogic goals chosen).

Remarkable is that according to the respondents the importance of a broader pedagogic responsibility for the teacher decreases as the pupils grow older. The mean of the 6 point scale concerning the importance of a pedagogic responsibility for the teacher in nursery school is quite high (3,52) while the mean for the scale concerning the teacher in primary education is 3.12 and for the teacher in secondary education only 2.70.

1.4 Social status of teachers in Flanders

In 1.1 we discussed the public esteem for teachers in Flanders. The results are positive: teachers are highly appreciated. However, high public esteem does not necessarily mean a high social status. Apart from an overall picture of the public esteem our study gives some indications for the status of the teaching profession in Flanders. We used the standardised international occupational prestige scale from Elchardus (1979), an adaptation of Treiman's (1977) International Occupational Prestige Scale to the Belgian context. These occupational prestige scales are the result of - by definition arbitrary - estimations of status differences by a heterogeneous group of respondents. Conform to Treiman (1977), the classification of occupations in Elchardus' scale contains four levels: from a general classification in major groups over subgroups and unit-groups to a list of specific occupations. All levels are provided with a prestige code.

Table 1.4 The prestige of teaching professions and a few occupations with comparable prestige (Elchardus, Belgium, 1979)

Occupation	Code
General practitioner	78
High school principal	72
Lawyer	71
Business manager of a bank	67
Primary school principal	66
Pharmacist	64

Teacher in **higher secondary education**	64
Teacher of deaf, blind, mentally disabled children	62
Other teachers and occupations in education	62
Staff manager	58
Charge nurse	58
Teacher in **lower secondary education**	57
Teacher in **primary school**	57
Teacher in **vocational education**	57
Social assistant	56
Journalist	55
Accountant	55
Secretary	53
Counter-clerk in a bank	48
Priest	49
Teacher in **nursery school** education	49
Policeman	40

In accordance with the findings of Treiman Elchardus concludes that, in general, the prestige of the teacher is relatively high. In our study, we examine how the current status of the teaching profession in Flanders is perceived. To gain insight in this matter, we asked the respondents to compare the status of the teacher in nursery school, primary school, lower secondary education and higher secondary education to the status of two other occupations. In each case the two occupations are picked from the standardised international occupational prestige scale developed by Elchardus (1979) and are (in this scale) situated near the various teaching professions. We asked the respondents to judge the position of the teacher against the other two occupations when compared in terms of 1) salary, 2) knowledge, 3) responsibility, 4) social benefit and 5) social prestige.

Hence, the status of the teaching professions (teacher in nursery education, primary education, lower secondary education and higher secondary education) was only examined in comparative perspective. This gives certain restrictions on the interpretation of the results. We are unable to pronounce upon the status of the teaching profession as such, we can only

discuss the status of the teacher compared with the status of two other occupations. However, this comparative perspective is useful because it gives us some important indications about the teacher's status in Flanders.

Status of the nursery school teacher compared with two other occupations

First we discuss the status of the nursery school teacher in current society. Therefore, we asked the interviewees to place the nursery school teacher – according to certain criteria – under/above/equal with the policeman and the counter-clerk in a bank. These are the results:

Table 1.5 Ranking of the nursery school teacher when compared to the policeman (N = 956) and the counter-clerk in a bank (N = 962) (%)

Nursery school teacher is ranked...	**Policeman**	**Counter-clerk**
Much lower	8,48	18,13
Lower	21,18	30,46
Equal	12,25	11,38
Higher	36,18	25,46
Much higher	21,91	14,57
Total	100,00	100,00

When the respondents are asked to compare the status of the nursery school teacher with the status of the policeman, we notice that the former is ranked higher. This is consistent with the occupational prestige scale developed by Elchardus (1979) where the policeman is also ranked lower than the nursery school teacher. Although in our survey this is confirmed by more than half of the respondents, there are important differences according the different status components (salary, knowledge, responsibility, social benefit and social prestige). Indeed in terms of knowledge, responsibility and social benefit the status of the nursery school teacher is considered higher. However, in terms of salary and social prestige the policeman scores higher.

The distribution of the answers regarding the status of the nursery school teacher compared with the counter-clerk in a bank is almost symmetrical (cf. table 1.5). 40% of the respondents rank the nursery school teacher higher, 39% the counter-clerk and 11% rank them equally. We find the same pattern in the different status components. The salary and the knowledge of a nursery school teacher are considered lower than the salary and the knowledge of a counter-clerk. In terms of responsibility and social benefit however, the nursery school teacher scores better. The social prestige of both occupations is considered almost the same. Remarkable is that in the occupational prestige scale developed by Elchardus (1979) the counter-clerk is clearly situated above the nursery school teacher. Hence, in relation to the clerk the nursery school teacher has 'gained' some status.

Status of the primary school teacher compared with two other occupations

The status of the primary school teacher was compared with the status of the charge nurse and the secretary (cf. table 1.6).

Table 1.6. Ranking of the primary school teacher when compared with the charge nurse (N = 960) and the secretary (N = 961) (%)

Primary school teacher is ranked...	**Charge nurse**	**Secretary**
Much lower	56,13	5,03
Lower	29,33	12,69
Equal	5,70	5,89
Higher	6,34	26,48
Much higher	2,49	49,91
Total	100,0	100,0

In the occupational prestige scale developed by Elchardus (1979), the charge nurse is ranked higher than the primary school teacher. This is confirmed by 85% of the respondents. So, in general, the status of the primary school teacher is considered lower than the status of the charge nurse and that for all status components. For the occupation of secretary we see the reverse: a little more than three out of four people rank the primary school teacher higher than the secretary. This corresponds to the occupational prestige scale developed by Elchardus. Only in terms of salary, both occupations are comparable. In terms of knowledge,

responsibility and (especially) social prestige, the primary school teacher ranks higher than the secretary does.

Status of the teacher in lower secondary education compared with two other occupations

In the occupational prestige scale developed by Elchardus, the teacher in lower secondary education, the social assistant and the accountant are ranked equally. In our survey apparently it is difficult to compare the status of the teacher in secondary education with the status of the social assistant (cf. table 1.8)

Table 1.8 Ranking of the teacher in lower secondary education when compared with the social assistant (N = 534) and the accountant (N = 536) (%)

Teacher in secondary education is ranked...	**Social assistant**	**Accountant**
Much lower	17,71	21,50
Lower	26,18	32,02
Equal	11,49	10,79
Higher	25,79	20,69
Much higher	18,83	14,99
Total	100,00	100,00

For the comparison of the teacher in lower secondary education with the social assistant, the answers show a quite symmetrical distribution: 44% of the respondents rank the teacher higher, 44% rank the teacher lower and 12% indicate that the status of both occupations is the same. The categories 'much lower' and 'much higher' are in balance, just like the categories 'lower' and 'higher'. This symmetrical distribution is also found for the evaluation of the different status components. In terms of salary and prestige the teacher in lower secondary education is ranked higher. In terms of responsibility and social benefit the social assistant is

ranked higher. Further, the respondents indicate that both occupations require about the same amount of knowledge.

Based on the results of the comparison with the accountant, it impossible to make an straightforward conclusion about the status of the teacher in lower secondary education (cf. table 1.8). on the one hand, a majority of the respondents (53,5%) think that the teacher in lower secondary education should be ranked 'lower' or 'much lower' than the accountant. On the other hand, 15% rank the teacher 'much higher'. The accountant's salary, responsibility and prestige are considered higher than the salary, the responsibility and the prestige of the teacher in lower secondary education. The knowledge required for both occupations is considered to be almost the same. In terms of social benefit however, the teacher in lower secondary education scores much higher than the accountant.

Status of the teacher in higher secondary education compared with two other occupations

The respondents were asked to compare the status of the teacher in higher secondary to the status of the pharmacist and the business manager of a bank. The results show a great unanimity about the status of the teacher in higher secondary education compared with the status of the pharmacist and the business manager of a bank: the teacher is ranked much lower than those two occupations (cf. table 1.9).

Table 1.9 Ranking of the teacher in higher secondary education when compared with the pharmacist (N = 594) and the business manager of a bank (N = 537) (%)

Teacher in higher secondary education is ranked...	**Pharmacist**	**Business manager of a bank**
Much lower	73,18	45,30
Lower	18,84	34,15
Equal	1,83	6,12
Higher	4,18	11,91
Much higher	1,97	2,53
Total	100,00	100,00

The comparison of the alleged professional status of the teacher in higher secondary education with that of a business manager of a bank shows that in general the business manager is clearly ranked higher. Almost 80% of the respondents share this opinion. 45% of the

respondents even believe *the teacher in higher secondary education* should be ranked 'much lower' on the occupational prestige scale. Especially a manager's salary, prestige and responsibility are considered higher than those of a teacher. Also in terms of knowledge the manager is ranked higher but the difference is less extreme. The social benefit is the only dimension in which the teacher in secondary education scores higher than the business manager of a bank.

The difference in status between the pharmacist and the teacher in higher secondary education is even greater. Almost 75% of the respondents believe the status of the teacher in higher secondary education is 'much lower' than the status of the pharmacist. Moreover, almost 20% rank the teacher in higher secondary education 'lower' than the pharmacist. According to the respondents, the position of the teacher in higher secondary education compared to the pharmacist is very clear. The salary, the knowledge, the responsibility as well as the social prestige of the pharmacist are considered higher than those of a teacher. In addition, in terms of social benefit, the pharmacist is ranked higher but the difference is less extreme.

Conclusion

Our limited study concerning the status of the teaching profession (per category of teachers and compared with two other occupations) reveals some important findings. The results confirm that the status of the teaching profession is not an unequivocal, stable fact. Depending on the occupation it is compared to, the status of the teacher is considered much higher (e.g. the teacher in primary education versus the secretary) or much lower (e.g. the teacher in higher secondary education versus the pharmacist). However, this study shows that in comparison with 1979 and in comparison with other occupations, there is - apart form the status of the teacher in higher secondary education, compared to the status of the pharmacist and the business manager of a bank - no decline in the status of the teacher

Another important finding is that the different teaching professions in general and compared with the other occupations, score high for social benefit, average for knowledge and low for salary. This means the teaching profession is characterised by status inconsistency. There is a tension between the different status dimensions that form an indicator for the concept 'status'. Clearly, public opinion is convinced that teachers in each level of education fulfil an important social role. Nevertheless, at the same time the respondents indicate that the salary

and - to a lesser degree - the social prestige of teachers are not in balance with this important social role.

2. Discussion of the results from the study on public esteem, focussing on gender

Introduction

In the following we will discuss our findings in a more elaborate way and with a gender lens. We have conducted a literature study on gender and teachers. This literature study implied texts on 1) the feminization tendency in the teaching profession, 2) differences between male and female teachers in professional practice and self, 3) the "gendered" image of teaching and 4) the role of gender in the professional lives of teachers. It is not our intention to present gender as the single or most important explaining factor concerning the public esteem or the social status of the teaching profession. Nevertheless, it is very interesting to link gender, public esteem and social status because connections between them are often made in literature and because images, perceptions, meaning constructions and representations are the core of these three concepts.

2.1 Public esteem for teachers

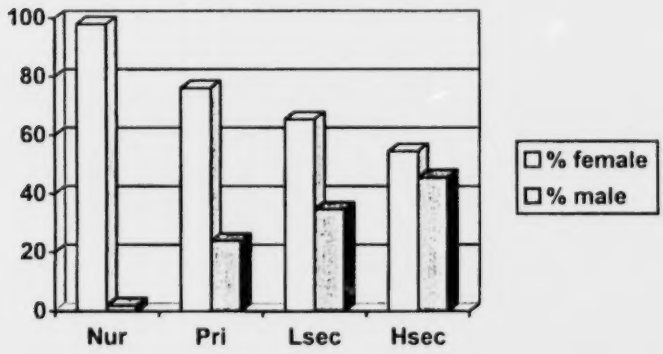
As stated above our study on the public esteem shows that all teachers are highly valued. Teachers in nursery schools get the highest esteem, followed by primary school teachers and subsequently teachers in secondary schools. Remarkable is that particularly the most feminized areas in education are valued most (cf. table 2.1 and figure 2.1).

Table 2.1: Absolute figures and percentages of male and female teachers on 15/01/02.

	Absolute numbers		%	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Nursery	334	16 395	2	98
Primary	7795	24859	23,9	76,1
Lower secondary	7904	14 909	34,6	65,4
Higher secondary	16034	19191	45,5	54,5

Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap (= Ministry of the Flemish Community), 2002

Figure 2.1: Visual presentation of the percentages of male and female teachers on 15/01/02 (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2002).



In literature, we find two main approaches to female teachers. The first approach perceives female teachers as a problem, the second states that teaching matches women's natural vocation:

Female teachers as a problem

In Belgium, like in many Western countries, there have been two feminization tendencies; one at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century and a recent but less advanced one in the eighties. In primary education, this feminization has started earlier and is more extensive than in secondary education. These feminization tendencies have not developed in the same way and at the same tempo in all Western countries (Harrigan, 1992; Depaepe, Devroede & Simon, 1993, Karsten, 2000). In some countries (like the United States), the first feminization

started earlier and in others (like Germany) this process has not begun until the Second World War (Coppens, 2002).

Popular discourse, but also educational policy, teaching scientists and teachers often present this feminization as a problem (Acker, 1995; Lahelma et al., 2000).

"No country should pride itself on its educational system if the teaching profession has become predominantly a world of women." (Langeveld, 1963, p. 404).

Worries are expressed that education loses quality, that boys lack male role models and that the prestige of the job diminishes. Female teachers are criticised for not understanding boys (Smedley & Pepperell, 2000). It is argued that females lack authority in regard to male pupils, have low career aspirations, are less involved in their jobs because their main focuses are on housekeeping and raising their own children. This pessimism about feminization is called the "negative thesis" (Laird, 1988 in Acker, 1995). These worries were expressed particularly at the start of the twentieth century, but studies by Lahelma et al. (2000), Bailey (1996), Benton DeCorse & Vogtle (1997) indicate that some of this reasoning still exists in the minds of teachers and parents today.

According to our study on the public esteem of teachers, these worries do not seem to influence the respondents in their judgement of these teachers. Based on the conclusion that nursery and primary teachers are most valued and that the respondents do not perceive a major decline in public esteem, we believe we can nuance these worries. Society seems to perceive that those teachers, although they are mainly female, are doing their jobs very well. Thus, our respondents do not seem to perceive feminization as a problem with regard to the quality of education.

Women's natural vocation

On the other hand and contradictory to the worries expressed concerning female teachers, many authors (like Acker, 1994; Biklen, 1995; Weber & Mitchell, 1995; Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999) mention and criticise that teaching is often labelled as a typically female profession. In popular images of education (especially to small children) and the task of the teacher, associations with femininity, motherhood and caring play a prominent part. In this discourse a good teacher is often compared to a good mother who loves her children, takes care of them and even sacrifices herself for them. Teaching, like mothering creates social expectations like altruism and self-sacrifice. The words "money" and "career" do not fit into this discourse. Teachers are expected to work very hard out of love and for the sake of the children. Teaching is presented as a kind of vocation or calling (see also 2.2 about the

consequences for the status of the profession). In this view women have innate capacities for working with small children. Some of the proponents of this opinion (Nias, 1989) see caring as an essential part of the teachers' self and of education to small children. Griffith and Smith (1991 in Acker, 1995) refer to this image as the "mothering discourse"[3] in teaching and Meiners (2002) as "The Legacy of Lady Bountiful".

This fusion of caring and teaching dates back to the 19th century prescriptions for middle-class mothers and the theories of Fröbel and other reformers (Acker, 1995), but still exists in popular culture and in the heads of teachers and teacher educators (Meiners, 2002). Also according to the respondents in our study, the importance of a broader pedagogic responsibility for the teacher decreases as the pupils grow older. This is an indication that this "mothering discourse" also lives in the minds of our respondents.

Research on men who choose to teach small children and consequently do not fit into this picture shows that they are often thought of by parents or colleagues as incompetent for this kind of work or are even under suspicion of sexual perversity (Benton DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Sumsion, 1999; Sargent, 2000; Meiners, 2002).

These maternal images have been criticized, especially on grounds of tendencies toward essentialism (the idea that women are like this 'naturally') (Acker, 1995), but knowing this view is still common, a higher valuation of the most feminised areas in teaching like nursery and primary education seems understandable.

2.2 Status

Relation between the mothering discourse and status

Some elements of the mothering discourse, as described above, can also be linked with the status of the teaching profession. Firstly, in this discourse, teaching (particularly of small children) is perceived as the extension of the 'natural' roles of a woman. Consequently, the idea that teaching is not a real profession that requires an extended *education* is furnished (cf. teaching is labelled as a semi-profession). The respondents of our study perceive the required training in the same way. 83% agree with the statement "teaching is mainly learnt by doing".

[3] Also called the "Caring Discourse" or the "Mumsy Discourse"

The same idea comes back in teacher training at various levels. In Flanders, teachers in nursery education have less theoretical training. The older the pupils, the more extensive the teacher's education.

Secondly, this same idea has a reflection in the *pay structures*. A teacher's pay increases with the age of the child being taught. The government of Flanders has now committed itself to make the pay of nursery, primary and teachers in lower secondary education equal. Duncan (1996) indicts the way this discourse is tactically used to affect the outcomes of wage negotiations and work conditions.

It is also striking that although the majority of teachers are female, women are underrepresented in *directory positions* (Lee, Loeb & Marks, 1995; Maclean, 1992; Addi-Raccah & Ayalon, 2002). Flanders is not an exception. The number of women in directory positions in secondary education in 2001-2002 is about 25%. These leading jobs also have a higher status (cf. the occupational prestige scales of Elchardus, 1979 and Blees-Booij, 1994).

Another important element in this mothering discourse -as mentioned above- is the absence of values like career, money, salary, prestige... These values are even taboo because teaching is seen as a vocation or calling. In a study of Cammack & Phillips (2002), participants gently rebuked other teachers for not caring enough for children and for losing their sense of dedication. In this respect, we often hear the accusation that teachers should not only teach for the money, but for the "right reasons" (i.e. dedication). In contemporary society, precisely these elements (career,...) are very important in the construction of the status of a profession (Castells, 1998). As a conclusion, this image of the teaching profession has a possible negative influence on the status of the profession.

In our study on public esteem, we do not have data concerning the possible existence of this gendered image of teaching in the minds of the respondents. However, the vocational character of teaching arises in the answers of the respondents that indicate a statusinconsistency. Generally speaking, the various teachergroups, in comparison to other professions, receive an especially high score on social benefit, an average score on knowledge and a low score on wages. Thus, in the perception of the respondents, teaching is an important profession for society, but it does not require a much-extended education and it pays insufficiently.

Relation between feminization and status

Sociologists, educational scientists (a.o. Etzioni, 1969) and teachers (Lahelma et al., 2000) often assume that one of the consequences of a further feminization is a decline in the social

status of teaching. This statement was especially dominant in the eighties and still exists but has not been without critique. Opponents (like Acker, 1994; Jacobi, 1997) state that this hypothesis is found on stereotypical images of women (for example seeing women exclusively in family role terms) or on inadequate research (for example an oversimplified view of causality).

In our research on the status of the teaching profession, we cannot find support for this common statement either. The perception of the status of the teacher in nursery teaching, primary school teaching, and teaching in the first years of secondary education has not radically changed in comparison to the study of Elchardus in 1979. Only the status of the teacher in higher secondary education -compared to two other occupations- has decreased a little. It is striking that the feminization of secondary education has occurred in this period, namely in the eighties.

Male and female professions

Some authors state that the jobs of women are mostly perceived as less important in comparison to the work of men or are not even acknowledged as real professions (Bradley, 1989; De Lyon & Widdowson Migniuolo, 1989; Acker, 1995).

One could expect that in comparison to other professions, teaching (especially nursery and primary school teaching) is rated lower than typically male professions. We could not deduce this from our research. For none of the teachergroups we saw a tendency in the answers of the respondents to rate the more manly professions higher than the more womanly professions.

2.3 Future research on gender and teachers

Theoretical frame

In the previous chapter, we examined the public esteem and the status of teaching with a gender lens. A major conclusion is that all teachers are highly valued, particularly nursery school teacher and primary teachers. It is striking that these are the most feminized areas in education. It is also remarkable that in -the perceptions of the respondents- public esteem has not significantly decreased despite the feminization tendency in education. Thus, society does not seem to perceive the growing number of females as a problem for the quality of education.

Also concerning status our study reveals a noteworthy finding. The research shows no decline in the status of the teacher in nursery, primary and lower secondary education in comparison

with 1979 and in comparison with other occupations. Only for the status of the teacher in higher secondary education, compared to the status of the pharmacist and the business manager of a bank, a small decline was found. This contradicts the common thesis about the consequences of the feminization concerning status. It is namely often argued that the status of the profession diminishes as an effect of the growing number of female teachers. These notable results suggest a different story concerning the feminization than the widespread negative thesis in literature and incite us to continue examining the teaching profession with a focus on gender. The study also shows that according to society teachers have an important pedagogical responsibility, but it does not reveal indications for possible differences between male and female teachers concerning this pedagogical responsibility. It is clear that this is not the only aspect of the teaching profession in which gender processes play a part. We plan a qualitative study on the role of gender in the professional self[4] of teachers. Moreover, we will examine the perceptions of the participants (pupils, parents, colleagues, headmasters) in education about the professional practice of male and female teachers.

Although the focus of the expanded literature concerning gender and education is predominantly on the pupils, there is also a limited part of theories and research on teachers.

In this respect, it is necessary to make a distinction between real differences in the professional practice on the one hand and perceptions and cultural beliefs about differences between male and female teachers on the other hand. The majority of the latter give incoherent and even contrastive indications for differences. Moreover, these kind of studies are often criticized because of their essentialist approach[5] to gender differences (o.a. Connell, 1995; Carli, 1997; Epstein, 1999; Oyler, Jennings & Lozada, 2001; Ramaekers, 2001). This approach to behaviour is said to be too deterministic. It also deals with sex as a sufficient explaining factor for behaviour and thereby ignores other factors like interactive, cultural and structural aspects.

The gender perspective on the contrary, used in our theoretical frame, is based on a combination of the four main approaches to gender: essentialist, socialization, structural[6] and social constructionist. We will put most weight on the last approach, whereby gender is seen as a social construction: maleness and femaleness are not or have not become (through

[4] For the conceptualisation of the professional self, we follow Kelchtermans (1994). He distinguishes 5 subconcepts; namely self-image, task perception, self-efficacy, job motivation and future perspective.

[5] The essentialist approach to gender maintains that innate or socialised, stable differences between the sexes shape divergent social behaviours. Masculinity and femininity are virtually synonymous with being male and female (Howard & Hollander, 1997).

socialization) properties of individuals. Gender is not only something society imposes on individuals, but men and women continually construct, reconstruct and enact it through everyday behaviour. Once a person is labelled a member of a sex category, she or he is morally accountable for behaving as persons in that category do. That is, the person is expected to "do gender". Constructionists emphasize the expectations and interpretations of the interaction partners as an important influential factor for behaviour. "Expectations of others create self-fulfilling prophecies that lead all of us to do gender" (Risman, 1998, p.23). The body of research on these perceptions, expectations and understandings of the main actors involved in education about male and female teachers is very limited. Together with Acker (1994, p. 87), we find it necessary to examine the expectations of pupils, colleagues, headmasters and parents with regard to the gender of teachers. Acker also pleads for the need to study the effects of these expectations on the behaviour of teachers. Therefore we will scrutinise the profession self for traces of gender and genderexpectations of others.

Research design

Our main research questions are:

- Are there –in the perception of the participants- differences according to the gender of the teachers in:
    - teamwork, commitment in extra-curricular activities, participation in school policy and in school culture?
    - the pedagogical-didactical approach and the quality of the education?
        - Are these perceptions related to:
            - the gender of the respondents
            - their opinions on gender and good education
            - their esteem of the teaching profession?
        - What are the expectations and experiences of the actors concerning male and female teachers?
- Are there differences in the professional self between male and female teachers? How does gender play a part in the professional life of teachers?

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[6] Next to the functioning of gender at the micro-level, shaping interactional expectations and possibilities (social construction), we also recognize gender as a basis for the systematic allocation of material resources and opportunities (Risman, 1998)

In our researchdesign, we will firstly focus on these expectations, perceptions and understanding of the partners in education, namely pupils, parents, teachers, colleagues and headmasters. Concretely, we will ask the pupils for example to write a short essay on their experiences with male and female teachers. After analysing these writings we will confront pupils in focus groups with these individual experiences and start up a discussion.
The parents' and headmasters' views on the gender of their children's teachers will be investigated with a questionnaire with open questions and the views of the colleagues will be dealt with as a part of the semi-structured interviews as described below.

Secondly, we will interview (semi-structured) teachers about their professional identity. We will investigate the way these expectations and popular images about teaching influence the professional identity of teachers. We will concentrate on differences or genderprocesses in self-image, task perception, job motivation, perceived efficacy, future perspective and well-being (=elements of the profession identity).
Finally, with participative research and logbooks, we will ask teachers to reflect with a gender lens on their professional lives. To facilitate a critical observation of their own professional lives, we will provide teachers with texts on gender dynamics.

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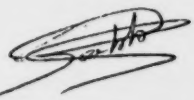
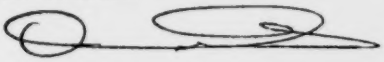
Signature: Isabel Rots Elien Sabbe  Antonia Aelterman 	Printed Name/Position/Title: Isabel Rots (master in Educational Sciences and scientific co-worker at the Ghent University) Elien Sabbe (master in Educational Sciences and doctoral student at the Ghent University) Prof. dr. Antonia Aelterman (head of the research group 'Professionalization of teachers')	
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